

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
REMARKS AT MACARTHUR MEMORIAL PARK
LEYTE
OCTOBER 20, 1994

President Ramos, honored veterans of the Philippine campaign, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is an honor and a privilege to represent the United States of America at this 50th anniversary of General Douglas MacArthur's historic return to the Philippines. President Clinton has asked me to express his regrets that he cannot be with us today, and to tell you that he is looking forward to visiting the Philippines next month.

President Clinton has also asked that I express, on his behalf and on behalf of all the American people, the gratitude and admiration of the United States of America for our guests of honor today, the veterans of Philippine liberation.

In our newspapers, on our television screens, and in the just-concluded re-enactment, we have been reminded of the dangers and the daring, the hazards and the heroism that made the Philippine liberation one of the epic stories of World War II. I salute the determination, the self-sacrifice and the patriotism represented by the veterans who have returned to Leyte. I know that many veterans who cannot be with us in person today still share these memorial events in heart and in spirit.

While we correctly and appropriately honor the heroism of our veterans today, I would also like to share some thoughts about the larger, human dimension of Philippine liberation. I am referring to the heroism of ordinary citizens, and particularly of the Filipinos on whose territory these battles took place.

Before the invasion, Filipino guerilla fighters, at a terrible cost to themselves, paved the way for this invasion by wearing down their occupiers. During the invasion, Filipino soldiers participated with U.S. and other Allied forces and performed with conspicuous heroism. And after American troops landed, Filipino citizens offered their friendship and unflinching support. We Americans have nothing but admiration for Filipino fortitude under extremely difficult circumstances, and are grateful for the friendship and support that they generously offered our soldiers.

Among all the stories of liberation, I have been most moved by the acts of human goodness in the midst of conflict and violence. We must express our thanks to those who paved the way for our forces, who fought alongside our forces, who sheltered and cared for wounded soldiers, who carried supplies to the front lines when the roads washed away, and who braved the dangers of the field of battle to carry wounded men to safety.

American veterans have told me how they were welcomed into your towns and into your homes. Filipinos who had barely enough food for their families invited GIs to share a papaya or a freshly-cut coconut. Homesick soldiers dropped by your homes to joke and to sing and to tell you stories about their families in the States.

Because of the generosity and hospitality that Americans experienced here in the Philippines, Filipinos were taken into the hearts of our veterans. Bonds of friendship and affection like these, forged in a time of the most terrible testing, can never be broken. The Americans who served in the Philippines and helped to bring about its liberation will never forget the Philippines and their Filipino friends. In fact, thousands of American veterans returned to the Philippines after the war to live and to work. And many have retired here among their friends.

And it is clear that the relationship between the Philippines and the United States has benefitted immensely from the millions of personal and family ties between Filipinos and Americans. These ties that now extend, fifty years later, from all the provinces of the Philippines to all states in the United States. Americans treasured your hospitality then, and we treasure your friendship now.

During his visit to the United States, President Ramos called for a new partnership between the Philippines and the United States. Mr. President, I am sure I speak for all my fellow Americans when I say that we welcome your call and with heartfelt enthusiasm. We extend our hands to you, as you have warmly and generously extended yours toward us.

On behalf of the United States of America, I say thank you to our honored veterans, to our Filipino friends and especially to all the people of Leyte who have welcomed us here today as much as their parents welcomed my fellow Americans half a century ago. Thank you very much.

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